



Monday 7th October 2019

Dear Customer,

Rainy old autumn is here. It won't stop raining. Soggy leaves are clogging up drains, ducks are sailing about on the fields, on the impromptu ponds and lakes, it's dark by 7pm. It's the beginning, we have it all to come.

But the good news is, it's Jerusalem artichoke week, or sun roots, as they are also called, being a species of sunflower. In French they are 'topinambours', where they boil them in their skins until tender, slip the skins off, slice them up and serve them mixed in a mustardy, lemony vinaigrette – delicious.

They remind me of spending time with a French boyfriend's parents in Brittany. It was very Marcel Pagnol'esque. They were peasant farmers, they wore clogs and had banks of caged rabbits in the yard. In the kitchen the cats lounged on the work surfaces. In the fridge a piece of dead rabbit on the top shelf dripped blood into the 'topinambour' salad below which had been prepared for lunch. Lunch was being set in the other downstairs room which was a giant fireplace and a large table. It had blackened walls, smoke from the fire was billowing in. A special vegetarian main had been prepared for me, a bowl of stewed wild mushrooms which his father had foraged that morning from the woods while slugging on a bottle of rose, drunk. I was very appreciative - so charming....and alarming. It was the hardest meal I ever ate.

During World War II the Nazis, apart from requisitioning 650,000 French people to join the prisoners of war to work in the fields and factories in Germany, they also requisitioned their food to cover their own shortages. Over a 4-year period – 2.8 million tonnes of wheat, 845,000 tons of meat, 220 million eggs and 711,000 tons of potatoes were taken. Jerusalem artichokes were not requisitioned, they helped France survive. They contain good amounts of vitamins A, C, B-complex and E as well as flavonoids like carotene, and they are an excellent source of minerals, most notably iron of which it has more than any other root vegetable.

And here a few recipes you could try with them:

Garlic Sauteed Jerusalem Artichokes

500g Jerusalem artichokes
a few bay leaves
1 splash white wine vinegar

olive oil
2 cloves garlic, finely sliced
salt and pepper

Peel the Jerusalem artichokes then cut them into chunks. Place them in an oiled frying pan and fry on a medium heat until golden on both sides. Add a few bay leaves, the garlic, a splash of white wine vinegar, some salt and pepper, and place a lid on top. After about 25 minutes, when softened, remove the lid and bay leaves. Cook for a couple more minutes to crisp up the artichoke pieces up one last time then serve straight away.

Herby Roast Jerusalem Artichokes and Potatoes

800g potatoes, peeled and chopped
4 tbsp olive oil
5 thyme sprigs

500g Jerusalem artichokes, peeled and halved if large
5 garlic cloves, unpeeled
3 rosemary sprigs

Preheat the oven to 190°C / 370F/ Gas 5. In a large roasting tray, toss the potatoes and Jerusalem artichokes with the oil. Season and roast for 30 minutes. Add the garlic and herbs, turning to coat in the oil. Use a small pan to crush each potato and Jerusalem artichoke slightly, flattening them and making fluffy edges. Toss through again and return to the oven for 30 minutes, turning halfway, until golden and crisp at the edges.

Jerusalem Artichoke Gratin with Hazelnut Crumble

1 sprig rosemary
700g potatoes, peeled and sliced ¼ cm thick
80g hard cheese, finely grated

3 garlic cloves
500g Jerusalem artichokes, peeled and sliced ¼ cm thick
600ml double cream

Crumble:

40g hazelnut
30g butter
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
25g flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

50g oats
2 medium onions, diced
1 sprig thyme

Preheat the oven to 180°C / Gas 4. Put the cream, rosemary and garlic in a saucepan, season and set over a low heat. Bring to a simmer then take off the heat and set aside to infuse for 20 minutes, strain and discard the aromatics. Cover the base of a 1.8-litre ovenproof dish with a layer of the infused cream. Add a layer of potato then a layer of Jerusalem artichokes. Season then add another layer of cream, spreading it out to just cover the surface. Repeat all the way up until the dish is full. Cover with foil then bake for 1 hour. Remove the foil, sprinkle the cheese evenly over the top then return to the oven for 20 minutes, or until the Jerusalem artichokes are tender and a butter knife cuts through them easily. Meanwhile, make the crumble. Spread the hazelnuts out on a baking tray and roast for 8 minutes. Add the oats to one side of the tray and cook for another 5 minutes. Chop the roasted hazelnuts and set aside. Melt the butter in a pan over a medium heat. Add the onions, garlic and thyme and season. Cook slowly for 10-12 minutes until the onions are soft. Remove and discard the thyme sprig, then stir in the oats, chopped hazelnuts and the parsley. Serve the gratin with the crumble scattered over the top.

It's Monday morning, and a new week, as we march inexorably forward to meet our fate. If all is predestined, if the future exists, it remains for us to find out what happened. Maybe someone could just nip forward and come back and tell us and put us out of our misery. Up on the moors yesterday I met a couple from Richmond with a shoe-making business exporting all over Europe. They were making contingency preparations to move to France. Crunch-time is coming. Anneka Rice, isn't she a terrible dancer.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel